

101st EVACUATION HOSPITAL



THE WAY THAT WE WENT

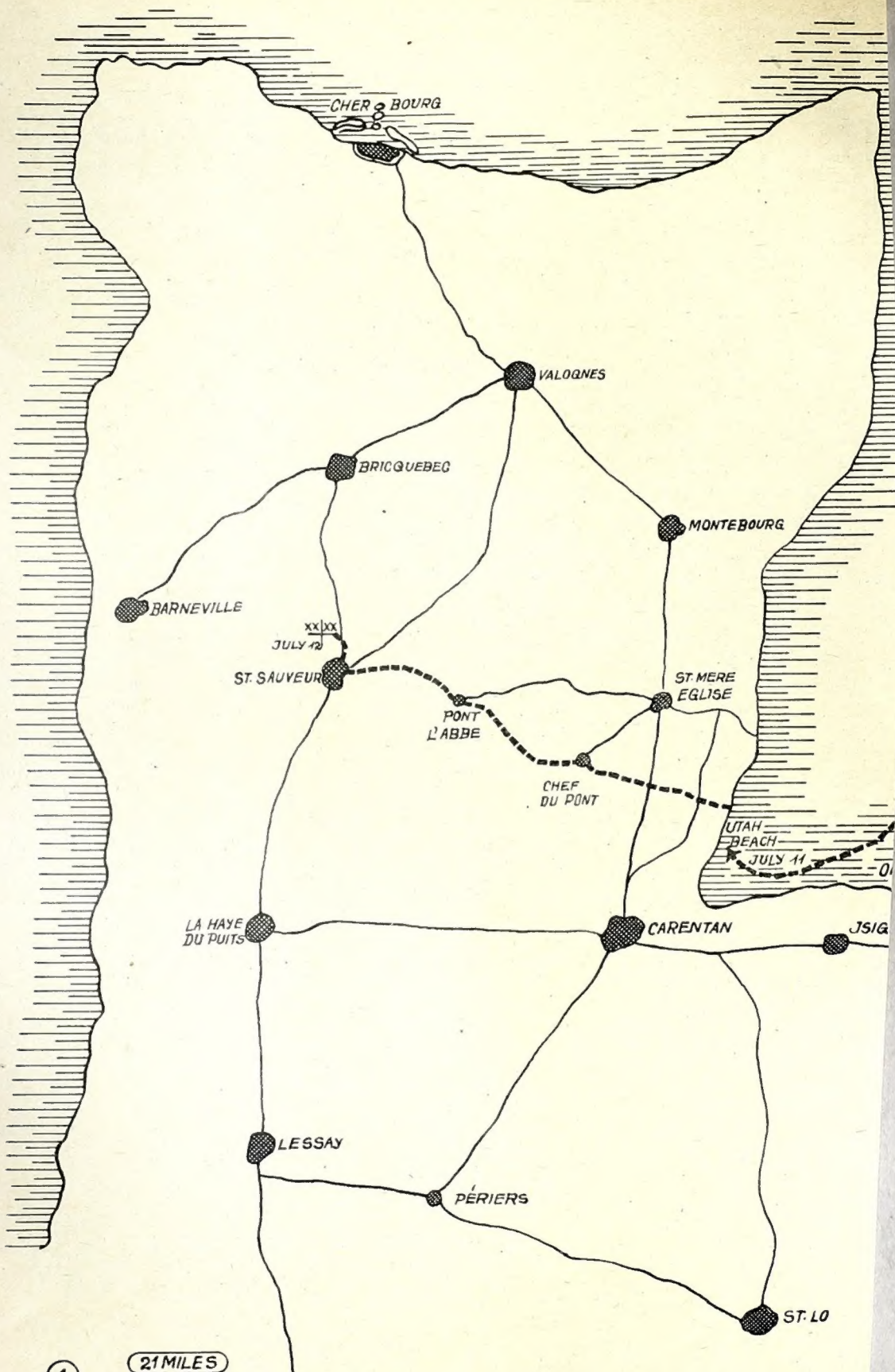
THE WAY THAT WE WENT

FOREWORD

Here is the story of the 101st Evac Hospital's eventful 10 months' journey across the continent of Europe.

There were 15 moves in all . . . some were long, hot and dusty; on others we got lost or rained on or nearly frozen to death. We have seen gorgeous landscapes, scenes of complete devastation, ancient and historical places amid the ruins of the once powerful German war machine.

We rode for the most part astride our hospital equipment, piled high on 2½ ton trucks and well exposed to the elements, but at any rate we had a good view of our surroundings. Maybe these maps will help to recall them. The following notes, taken along the way, might also help you to remember some of the things you'd like to remember.



Tuesday, July 11. . . The coast of France was in sight . . . LSTs in large numbers were ahead and behind us, all towing blimps for protection from air attacks. A few corvettes and destroyers protected our flanks. A hospital ship bound for England passed us going the other direction. It was evident we were not going to land in Cherbourg as we had hoped. It had been held since June 26th and repairs were still being made, but the beaches were still principally used. The shore became more distinct and we became more excited. We could realize how they felt approaching it on D-Day. LCIs discharged trucks, men and cargo on a pontoon dock. Planes patrolled constantly overhead. "Utah Beach" is flat with a few dunes behind. Soldiers swarmed over it like ants. Jeeps, ducks and cargo trucks ran about. Shattered concrete pillboxes, all that remained of the West Wall, could be seen. A few stone buildings along the shore were smashed. Huge shell holes dotted the hinterland. . . . With most of the unit assembled, we made our first, and last, organized "road march" on the continent, a four mile hike to "Transit Area B". Laden with full field equipment and plenty of K Rations we trudged over narrow rutted roads dotted with the ominous "Mines Cleared to Shoulders" signs. Everyone was hot, thirsty and excited. . . . The transit area was full of newly arrived troops who were busy pitching pup tents and heating rations. On the roads outside, trucks and tanks flowed by, bound for the front. . . . We settled down to await the arrival of a truck company which was to help move us to our location. It arrived at 0200 the following morning; our drivers were awakened, and the convoy lined up. Before we left, what was apparently an enemy plane zoomed overhead. Searchlights probed the sky and antiaircraft fire chased it away. What sounded like rocket shells went off above. We set out driving close-column blackout along a narrow macadam road. We were on the east coast of the Cherbourg peninsula heading west. We passed several ghost-like villages, left shattered hulks by the war. In the distance, guns rumbled and lit up the sky. . . . We finally arrived at the 35th Evac Hosp about 0430. Nearly everyone unloaded and went to sleep in ward tents or under the trees, for it was a beautiful night.

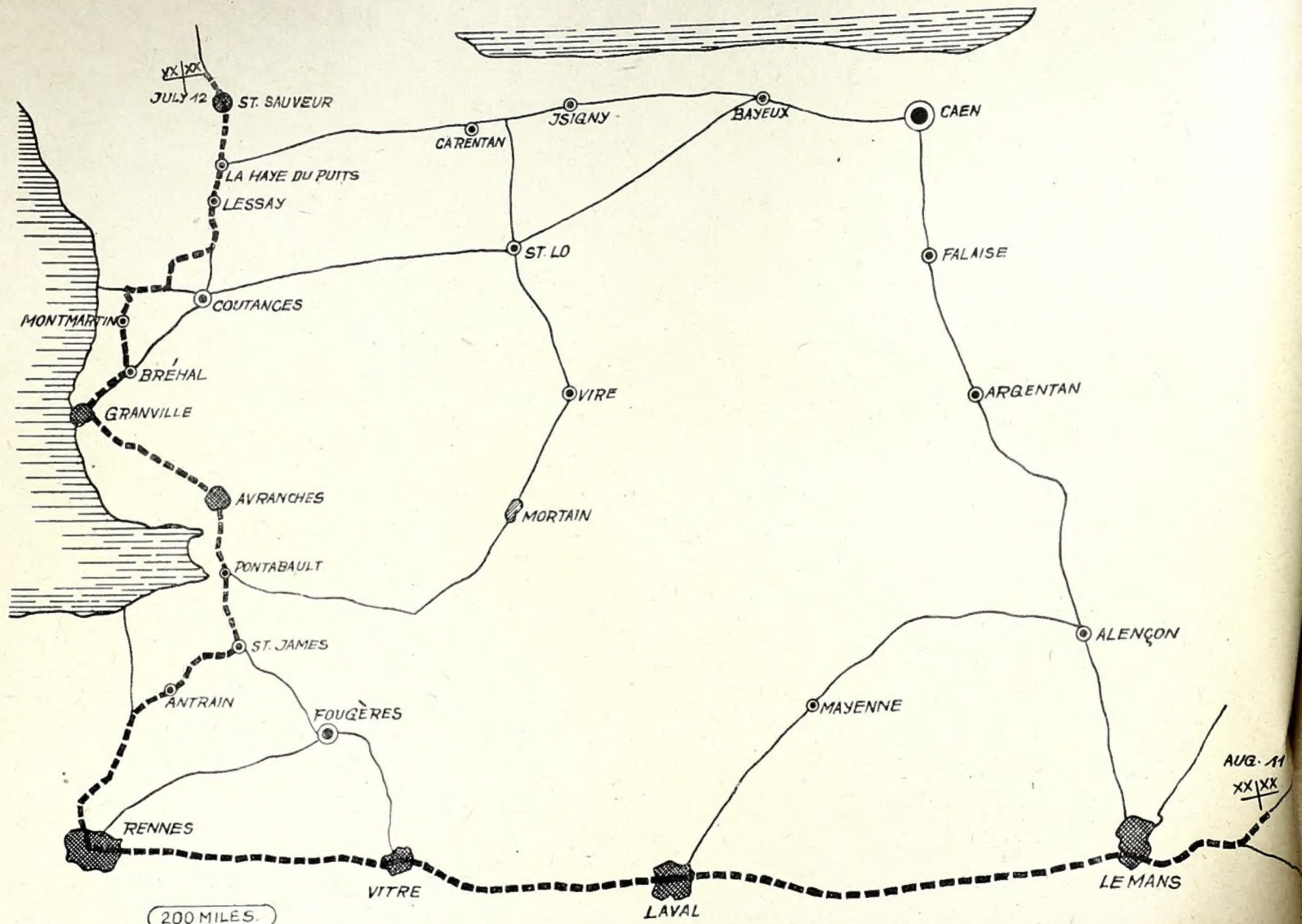
Breakfast, mostly C and K rations these days. In the afternoon a few ward tents were set up to serve as a dispensary for Army Headquarters. . . .

La Haye du Puits had just been captured a day or so before our arrival. Nearby was St. Sauveur le Vicomte, most of its buildings sliced in half by shells or battered into rubble by bombs. People still lived in these ruins. . . .

Beautiful weather after the fog and drizzle of England. Cold nights, warm sunny days. The cows in the adjoining field watched us with interest. Pup tents were lined up in neat rows and we had reveille every morning. . . . We met French civilians, who did our laundry, gave us our first cognac and taught us some French words in exchange for what we had that they wanted. The hospital opened a French ward. Casualties from land mines were not uncommon. . . . The unit was running smoothly, getting its share of work, feeling fresh and optimistic. Fantastic wagers circulated in OR. HQ tried to follow the war on a large scale map. . . .

Short haircuts were the rage. Someone had captured a goose, but who ate it was never known. The Third Army band hit the continent and gave us its first performance. . . . The Russians on August 1 were 10 miles from Warsaw. Will they beat us to Berlin? . . .

Units round about silently moved away one by one, to keep up with the front. Soon it would be our turn. We stayed at St. Sauveur just a month.



II.

Move to LeMans — a chaotic move with no loading plan and not enough trucks. However, all but three serials of supplies and personnel got off the first day.

It was a hot dusty ride crammed with scenes that were beautiful and tragic and impressive. A great deal of traffic going, and some large convoys of "Jerries" headed the other way. This is a gratifying sight to the French. A woman in a field brandished a pitch-fork as they passed, and shouted triumphantly "There go the Boches!" The Boches looked tired and sullen.

Wrecked German vehicles dotted the roadside, silent masses of twisted metal.

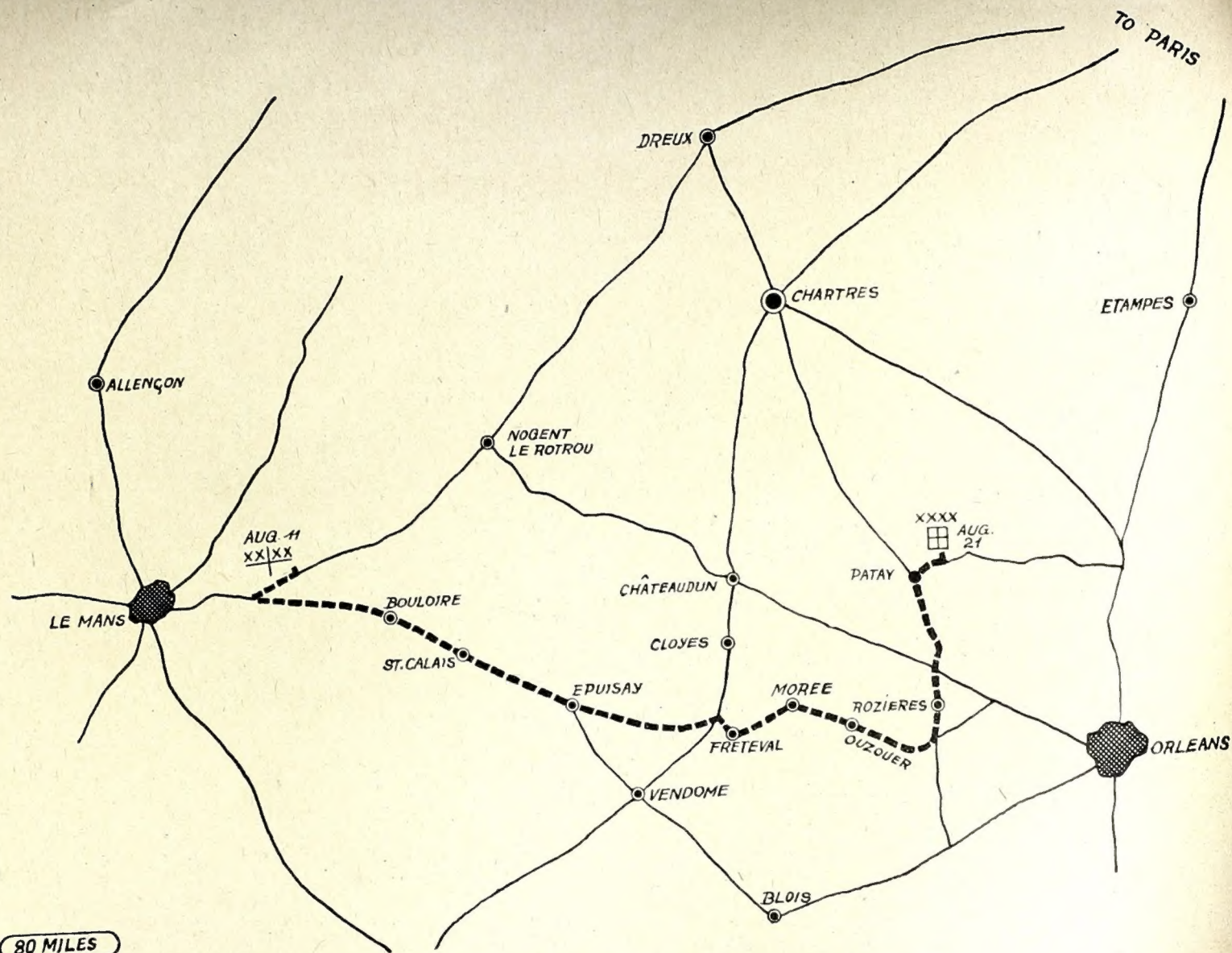
Towns like St. Sauveur and La Haye Du Puits are almost completely demolished while others suffered very little. One more fortunate little village had "Thank You" written on a banner stretched across the main street, though the people themselves were on hand to express this sentiment. This was one time when shouting and waving from trucks was not considered out of place. The French are very demonstrative, and we have the reputation for being the same. They waved at us like old friends and held up their hands in the V for Victory sign.

Arrived at the new area about 2000, looking like a troupe of minstrels from the wind, the dust and the intense sunlight.

The Germans hit the Avranches corridor hoping to split our forces in Normandy from those in Brittany. Our counter move was to envelop both their flanks, thereby creating a pincers. A large number of German divisions were trapped. On the 15th, news came of a landing in southern France.

The hospital was too busy even to listen to rumors. Admission was always jammed. We had many French soldiers and PWs. A new hospital set-up put the whole surgical section under one "roof", and was S.O.P. from then on. Wards were full to overflowing, the motor pool doubled as litter-bearers, OR worked feverishly around the clock and Evacuation dispatched patients to convalescent hospitals and airstrips. ... Weather was clear but very hot, and yellow-jackets clustered around the bread and jam at mealtime. A large chateau overlooked our area, used as a C.P. by the Allied High Command in World War I and by the Germans in this one. ... Le Mans was large and attractive, and full of soldiers buying gifts, and stocking up on cognac and champagne which were plentiful. ...

Patton began his drive toward Paris and the BBC lost track of him in the confusion. A new move for us was indicated. The unit shut down, ambulances hummed about the area gathering patients, we tore down, loaded and shoved off in echelons toward Paris, the last group getting caught in a downpour that flooded the area and seemed to give an added stimulus to the departure.



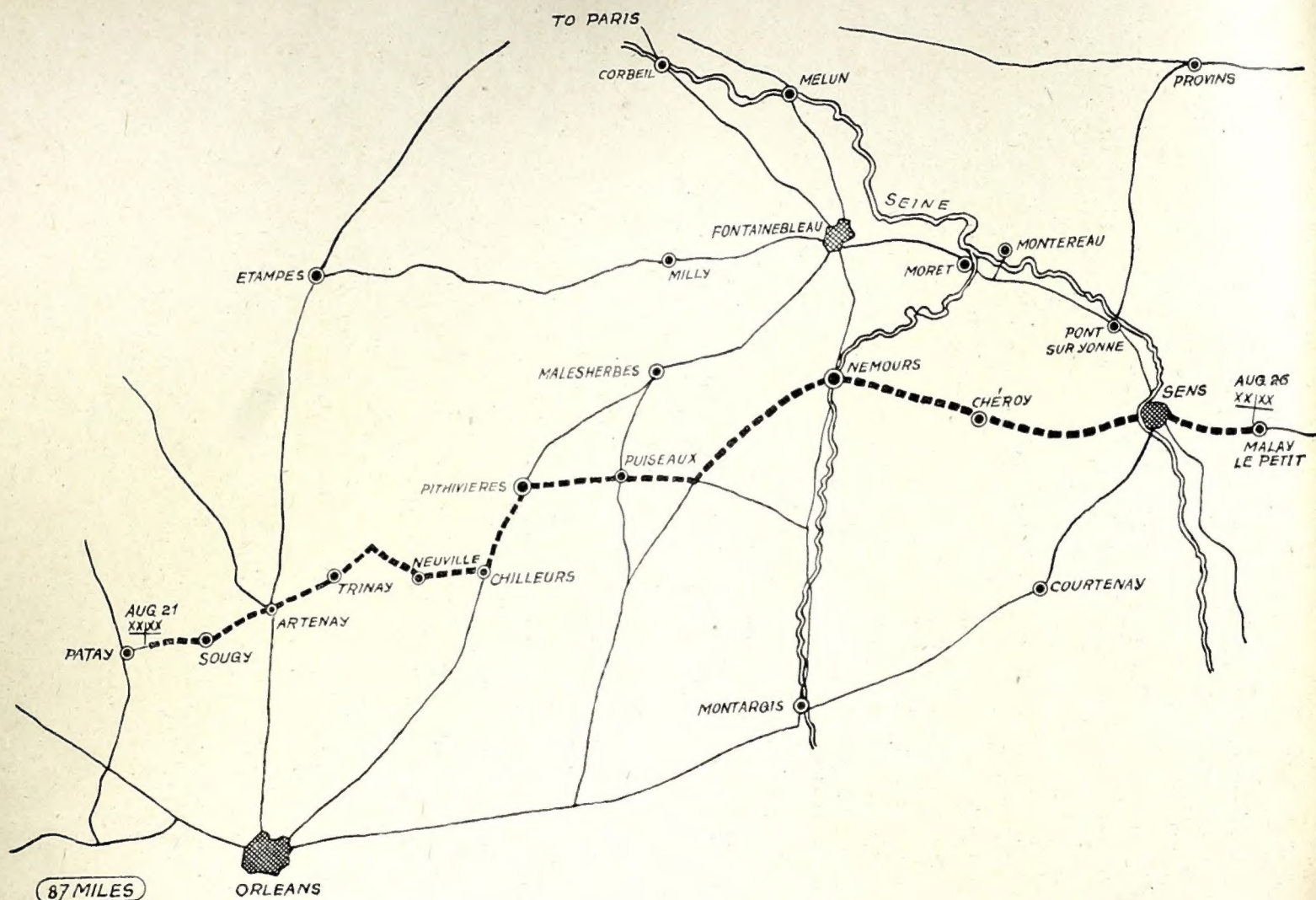
III.

A short "break", as the hospital bivouacked on the outskirts of the little town of Patay, about 60 mi. southwest of Paris. Paris was liberated while we were there; General LeClerc entered the city while our tank columns by-passed it to the south, still going a mile-a-minute.

The countryside here spread out in all directions, flat as a board. Many odd looking concrete towers (doubtless built by the Germans) were visible, as well as stacks of grain resembling giant cup-cakes. Rain made the area a marshy bog until the sun reappeared and dried it up.

Here we had a spirited critique of operations thus far, a booster shot of the Articles of War, and a thorough duffel-bag upheaval. The Ward Boys defeated the Surgical Team 12—8 in an exciting ball game which the nurses applauded as they hung their laundry out in the noonday sun.

The citizens of Patay flocked out to see us in droves; bringing vegetables, fruit and eggs in little bags, and seemed to enjoy watching us eat, sleep and converse with them in a great variety of accents. We in turn visited Patay, had showers in a former German hospital still littered with rubbish from their departure, and went into most of the places marked "Vin", came back with more fruit, eggs, and perhaps some French bread, which we were acquiring a taste for.



IV.

En route from Patay to Sens on August 26, the character of the countryside changed. Instead of flat farm land there was sweetscented forested country resembling northern Minnesota. We saw several tanks scurrying around in the woods evidently after snipers. Further on a prisoner of war enclosure was being built for expected occupants. Approaching Sens we found hilly terrain. The city itself was large and active, had suffered no damage from the Germans' hasty retreat. Patton's tanks were said to be 30 miles beyond. Our area was on a gentle slope overlooking a beautiful valley, about 6 miles from town.

We swam in an icy creek near the area for a few days until the hospital opened. A gentle autumn rain caressed us once again. Passes were authorized to town, and we bought gifts, films, post-cards, etc, without much difficulty. You could have supper (consisting of soup, a little meat, potatoes, vegetable, bread, wine and a baked apple) at a restaurant after 7 o'clock, and many bought supplies which they took back to the area for a midnight snack, cooking over Coleman stoves or cans of Sterno.

Some of our nurses visited Sens. Here are their impressions.

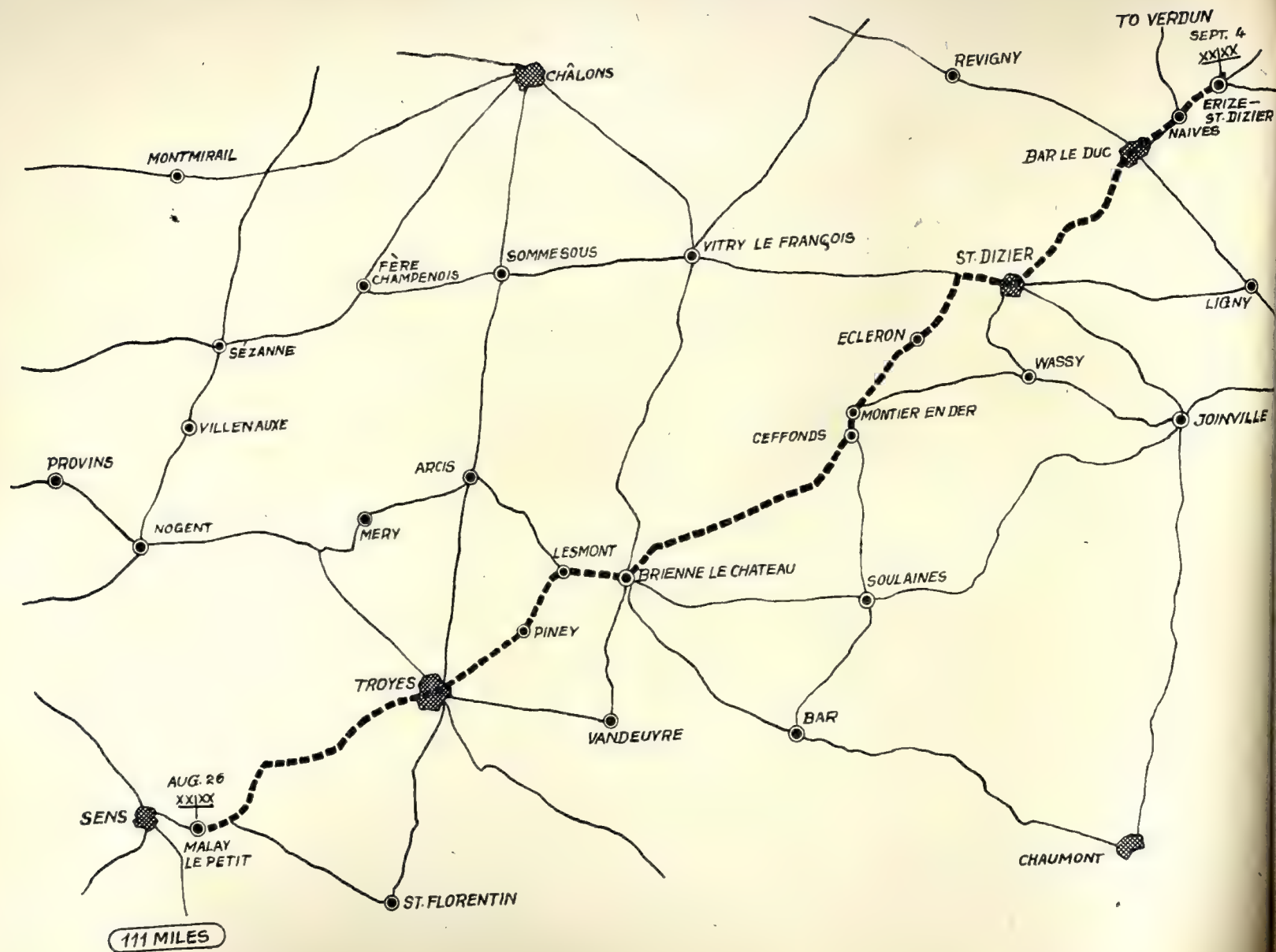
"You have a specific reason for shopping — you want perfume. So over the shoulders of a crowd of GIs you hand a 500 franc bill for a bottle you can't even smell, but being American, you're gullible. It's labeled "Made in France" so you buy it.

"You want food so you start on a tour but everything is closed until 1900 so you end up a connoisseur of wines. You have your choice, "Blanc" or "Rouge", conversing by the sign language. You begin your ambulatory sight-seeing inspection. There's hardly time to look around because you're busy shaking hands, saying Bonjour and waving til you feel as though you were up for nomination. . . . You wander past flowered court-yards and through narrow Quebec streets — you stare at them and they stare back at you.

"With handshakeitis and sore feet you idle into the Cathedral disregarding personal religion. Suddenly the stillness absorbs and awes you, the organ quiets the screaming in your ears, you are alone with yourself. The blazing evening sun spurts a diadem of color through the stained glass windows, splashing fire across majestic marble columns. . . .

"You tear yourself away and climb into the truck — through the jumble of wine, people, incoherent language and sudden peace mixed with the desire to hit at least the tail end of the chow line. . . ."

About the first of September came the gasoline shortage. Drivers from front line outfits waited in line for days at gas dumps. Rumor had it, 1.) The dump at Le Mans was bombed, 2. The First Army got it all, 3.) The British got it all, 4.) General Patton personally led a convoy back to get some for his tanks. . . . The hospital was once again way behind the front, and we were delayed several days until we received movement orders and enough gas to get us there.



V.

Just outside the prosperous town of Bar le Duc lay Erise St. Dizier, consisting of a church and a few dilapidated farm houses at a crossroads. Each French village in this sector, however tiny, seems to have a World War I memorial in its main street, for this region bears many bitter memories of that previous struggle. Historic Verdun lay to the north and St. Mihiel was 30 miles away. At Thiaucourt (see Nancy map) was the American Memorial Cemetery, its grounds still being kept up by French gardeners. In it is a chapel containing a mosaic map of the section showing where each division fought. History repeats — the 90th Division is fighting, in September, '44, close to its location on the World War I map.

The Hospital flooded with casualties from this difficult Moselle sector. Raw, bitter, wet weather and the deadly German '88s blocked our advance. Patients arrived drenched and shivering, many in a state of shock. The area itself was a quagmire, churned up by trucks, ambulances and hundreds of feet. A severe windstorm sent personnel scurrying for sledges and hammers to pound tent stakes with, as many tents threatened to depart from their moorings. Pup tents leaked and their occupants arose damp, sleepless and bedraggled.

An occasional German plane overhead kept the O.D. slithering around in the mud at night checking blackout. Save for an occasional chink of light the area was pitch black and we groped from one tent to another, climbing over everything that got in the way. Many wandered into the "Snack Bar" by mistake. The weather cleared for a spell and autumn asserted itself, reminding us of bright colored leaves, orange sunsets and new clothes and football games; also the Presidential election in November. Ballots were coming steadily in the mail. Dewey and a new administration or Roosevelt for a fourth term?

September 17th the radio reported landings of the First Airborne Army in the Rhine estuary region of Holland. The barometer of optimism again soared; it might still be over by Armistice Day. First Army troops had penetrated the Siegfried Line near Aachen. There was fierce fighting around Metz and Lunéville was being entered, troops having crossed the Moselle in several places. We prepared to do the same.

VI.

Nancy was the largest and busiest city we had seen on our trip across France and GI activity there was incessant. We passed through the city for the first time on September 21, headed for Lennoncourt on the other side of the Moselle — the first evacuation hospital to cross. All bridges across the Moselle were of course blown out, but the engineers had two new ones constructed already. They trembled incessantly as everything from jeeps to bulldozers heavily caked with French soil, passed over them.

The sun was shining when the first echelon of the hospital hit Lennoncourt and the ground was smooth and grassy, suitable for playing tennis. When we departed 10 days later, water polo might have been in order — the field had become a churned up morass into which the engineers had dumped loads of rocks and gravel to make it navigable.

There was an artillery gun in a grove of trees in the next field, which thundered forth at the enemy every half hour. We were closer to the front lines than we had ever been.

Two smaller units, the 432nd Collecting Co. and the 610 Clearing Co. were now working with us, the 432nd augmenting the hospital personnel and the 610 functioning separately in an adjacent field, though in the next move they joined with the hospital. We found many new friends in their ranks, and they were destined to make many long moves with us before the war finally came to a close.

The rain continued, a cold wind driving it in horizontal sheets across the landscape. Artillery rumbled off and on all day and night. There were many serious cases hovering between life and death in the operating room and in many wards. Wet figures clustered about red hot stoves warming their hands, but their feet were cold and numb.

The Third Army attack slowed down while fighting continued around the fortress of Metz.

Nights in the hospital were long and grim. A nurse writes her impressions of the lonely vigil in the wards. . . .

For the most part you don't think or wonder or try to reason beyond the moment. . . . But sometimes at night there is a lull when you sink onto a blanket-covered box beside a hissing gasoline lantern and just listen, and it all comes over you with a rush. . . . Strange thoughts in an unnatural setting as you hear the breathing of wounded men, like a weird symphony in the darkness. . . . Noises, great and small. . . . rain hurling against canvas. . . . moaning winds and the splash of muddy boots. . . . a sudden cry, breaking the stillness like a trumpet. . . distant, thunderous drums that shake the earth, reverberating. . . .

The patients are restless — you quiet them with words. They answer in low-pitched voices; whispers tense with pain and anxiety that wander, sometimes clear, sometimes faint; but you listen, nor try to check their course. . . .

A few precious moments come with midnight chow, when tense, weary doctors, nurses, technicians, ward men gather. The strain is eased; perhaps talking and laughter is immoderate — it braces them for the "graveyard shift". . . . The tent is brightly lit, warm and pleasant with the smell of strong coffee and hot food. You wipe the rain off the top of your steel helmet and perch on it, balancing the mess kit in the way that has become second nature; or perhaps you gather around a table. There is a rustling of tent flaps as another figure laboriously crawls through, glistening with the wet, fixing the "blackout" behind him. Perhaps it's a surgeon who has just left a shattered brain case in OR, or it may be the guard just relieved from his post (if so, he will beat his hands together and exclaim, "That was the longest 2 hours I ever spent!"), or it may be a driver in from a long convoy moving another hospital. . . .

It is occasions like these, when things seem clearly and easily defined — when everyone, great or small, is working toward the same end, and those guys on litters become more personal and more individual, and how wonderful and how hoped-for is the time when this damn war comes to its inevitable end.

VII.

Ten days of this and the unit received orders to move into buildings in Nancy. The Third Army advance had bogged down in the mud of France.

The hospital started tearing down and moving into Nancy to a beautiful, modern, Gothic structure on the outskirts of town which originally was a seminary but was taken over by the Germans for a military hospital. Some nuns and priests were still there. The Germans had left in a hurry. Magazines, letters and trash still lay in the rooms and halls and plates of food remained in the dining room. Everywhere the harsh German writing was seen on doorways and halls. "Luftschutzraum" was the most common, with an arrow pointing in the general direction of the basement. . . .

The building was on the slope of a hill overlooking the city. It was in the form of a quadrangle with a courtyard in the center. With its lofty rooms and long, wide corridors the building was ideal for use as a hospital. Windows on the main halls were painted for blackout, and work went on day and night in artificial light. Chief exercise was climbing stairs. Litter bearers carrying a 250 lb. patient were most poignantly aware of this. A spacious chapel on the main floor was used for Sunday services, though later on it had to be turned into a ward when the trench-foot cases came thick and fast. . . .

Everyone slept in rooms. It was unbelievable — lights, running water, heat and beds with mattresses — but though we were delighted, we couldn't forget that word "semimobile".

A large and vivacious staff of French civilians helped to maintain the building, cleaning halls and waiting on tables, repairing the stubborn elevator by patients' mess, etc. A band of tattered PWs were kept busy with most of the dirty work and soon the area round about was tidied up in accordance with an unofficial S.O.P.

An ominous droning at night on several occasions unleashed a terrific volley of anti-aircraft which scounded as though it were concentrated on the very window you were looking out of. But the spectacle was too exciting to miss. Then the lights would flicker eerily and fade away. This happened when least expected, and whether due to faulty wiring or some supernatural agency was never clear.

For a short time, war took second place for the marriage of one of our own nurses and a British officer — the first Anglo-American alliance on French soil since the liberation. The Chaplain officiated at an impressive ceremony in the big chapel, with the Colonel as best man.

We got well acquainted with Nancy which was large, modern, and notoriously hard to find your way around in. Fortified by wine or a few beers (or both) on a cold afternoon, you hazily contemplated the Yuletide season which seemed very distant, and ambled down the "main drag" in search of gifts appropriate and distinctly French. You passed a corner of Stanislaus Square with its graceful wrought-iron gates gilded in gold. You walked into a photo shop someone had told you about, found many other military personnel with the same idea, but decided to "sweat it out", which you did. Emerged two hours later into the midafternoon sunshine which immediately clouded over and began to rain in buckets, clearing, however, as you reached the sanctuary of the ARC donut dugout. . . . Another quick sprint through the rain to where the truck waited; a few more beers, and a cold, invigorating ride back to the hospital in time for dinner. . . .

The hospital operated in fits and starts. Sometimes the tressles in Pre-Op would be neatly folded, and personnel would stand about smoking, chatting or playing cards — then ambulances would be heard in second gear outside, and men would issue forth, wet, unshaven and exhausted, filling up the corridors, forcing a wan smile at the coffee and donuts offered by the Red Cross. . . .

first time some of our men were taken out for medical duties in combat outfits. It brought closer to home.

made little progress. This was reflected in the uneasiness — the restlessness of the patients. They were most aware of this. . . .

night they sleep the sleep of exhaustion. The second night they just sleep. From then on, follows another — "This life is making me soft when do I go back? —" "If I don't go my unit — those men are my buddies". . . .

echo the cry. Footsteps rebound against the voices, day and night, restless and incessant. Darkened windows hiding the outside world, closing as they shelter. . . .

ion of the war was hard on nerves. The end was now definitely postponed even by the chronic Thanksgiving Dinner came with all the "trimmin's" and brought a touch of homesickness to

how or other things got moving again. Clear cold weather had hardened the ground and the an losing some more of the map. . . . The air began to buzz with rumors, and the first w, the advance party had left.



31 MILES

VIII.

Through the shattered grey remnants of the town of Dieuze the hospital trucks wound their way, proceeding over a narrow, muddy causeway, making a sharp turn between two buildings and laboring on past an ancient, historic church with gaping holes in its roof. At length we came to the new location—a group of reasonably intact buildings that had served as barracks for French and then German soldiers. It was one of those bitter cold days which inspired everyone with abundant energy and the desire to get the stoves set up as soon as possible. Three buildings were chosen to house the entire hospital and the attached units. These buildings were full of huge cabinets, broken stoves, smashed windows and double-decker beds, most of which were ruthlessly flung from the open windows, making a pleasant scrunching sound as they hit the stone yard below. A jolly time was had by all. Everything, in fact, was tossed from those windows except the dead horses—they had been put in another building.

The exact arrangement of the hospital had not yet been determined and it was somewhat disturbing to haul luggage, beds and stoves into a room and then be told that Ward 21 was going to be put there. Individual aggressiveness determined your degree of comfort, but everyone managed to keep warm and dry, even if they did have to leave the building in the wee, sub-freezing hours to get shaving water and attend to other matters.

The Motor Pool had taken over a big, undamaged garage, and vehicles were under cover for the first time. Supply had a building to itself, big enough to play basketball in the center. The Mess Hall was large but none too large for our augmented organization, and the roof had to be covered with a ward tent so the rain wouldn't descend on the food. We really missed the warm, spacious seminary at Nancy.

It was on the 18th of December that the Germans counter-attacked in Belgium. The news for some time had not recorded any great progress, but this was a bewildering setback, and hit home. Reports were wild and varied. Third Army forces were being rushed up to defend the break-through, to be replaced in this sector by 7th Army troops. Three days later the Germans had still not been stopped, were said to have smashed one of our armored divisions, captured two evac hospitals and a field hospital and to have taken a great deal of our supplies and even used American tanks against us.

The prospects for Christmas were dreary. We expected to move—maybe on the 25th itself, or the day after. A Seventh Army evac (the 93rd, active in the Italian campaign) was coming to take over. We closed down but did not move as expected, so everyone tried to recapture a Christmas spirit that was difficult to feel. Religious services were solemn and impressive, and we sang the beloved carols with sincere fervor. Every department had its own decorative scheme with green wreaths and candles and cotton snow. The mess outdid itself in preparing dinner; there was an abundance of Yuletide punch, and a timely allotment of mail brought packages and cards from home. . . . There was something unreal about it all. Christmas and war don't mix. They never will. But unfortunately War was in season.

IX.

When 1944 sped through its final hours and gave way hopefully to a new year, the 101st had settled into another seminary — this time in Arlon, Belgium, where we were in position to receive casualties inflicted by the break-through. The Germans had been stopped and were being slowly pushed back. The city of Luxembourg was out of danger as our troops held firm. Part of the hospital convoy had passed through the city the night of the 28th and noted the wide streets and large modern buildings as they loomed silent and majestic in the moonlight. It was bitterly cold and trails of misty vapor were seen in the sky. As we reached the border town of Steinfort we saw patrols walking stealthily along the road. Paratroops had been reported dropped here. But we didn't see any, and reached Arlon without mishap.

New Year's found the hospital rapidly filling with patients who had begun to arrive before the hospital was completely set up. Arlon was a busy place. Vehicles rumbled down the hill past the Seminary; a railroad nearby was bombed, breaking a window in our chapel during Sunday morning service; and evenings were a symphony of anti-aircraft.

Among the many serious cases the hospital received in this area were men of the 101st Airborne Div. who had passed a memorable Christmas Eve at Bastogne. Their stand there in the face of the break-through was epic. We were proud, somehow, to share the number of their unit, and awed by their spirit and indifference to pain. It is bad taste to joke about the loss of an arm, unless you are the loser. Then it becomes the highest courage.

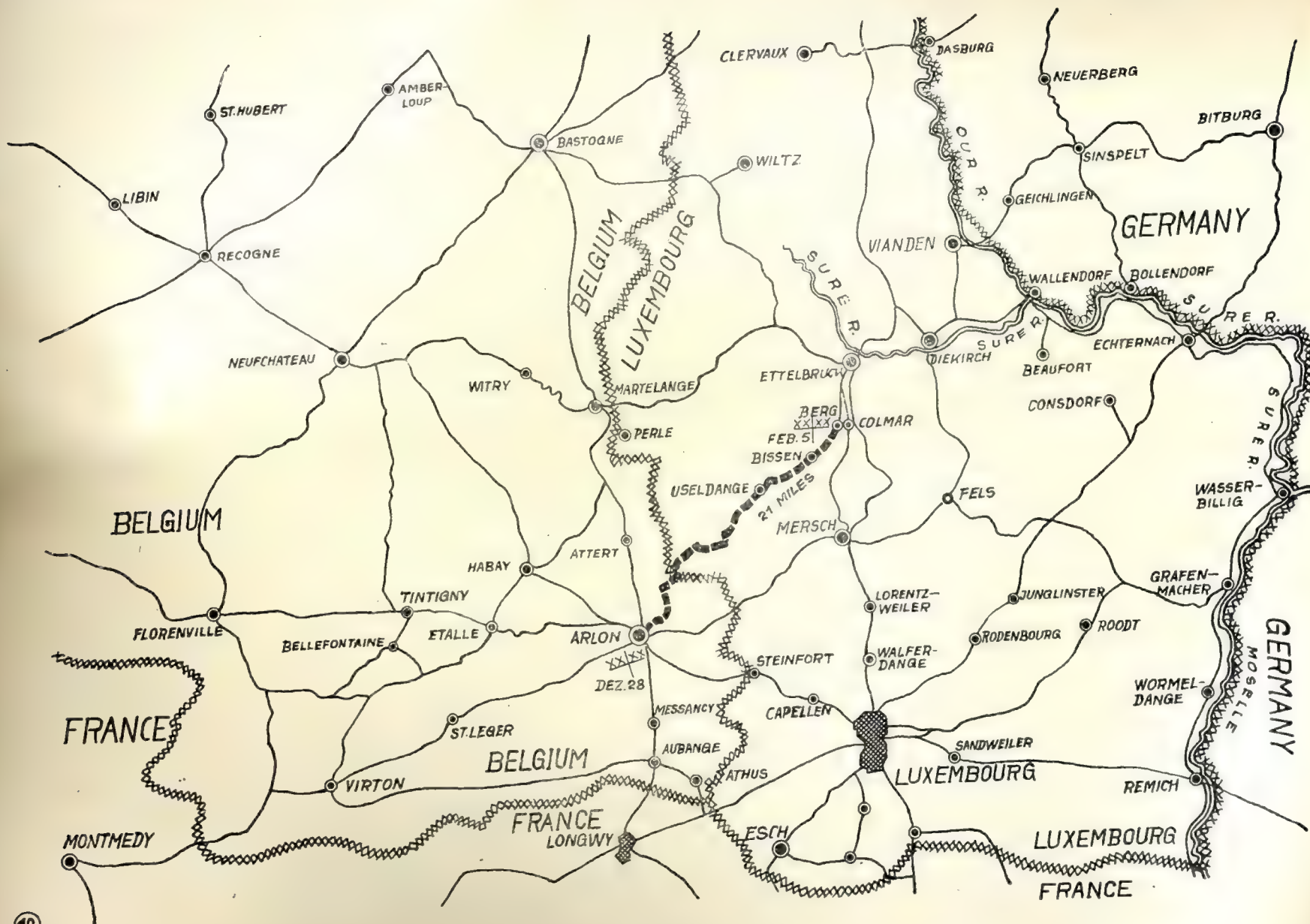
A heavy snowfall provided some gorgeous winter scenes. The spacious trees in the seminary grounds were canopied in white and reminded us of a New England etching. Some skis were found in the building which inspired a few athletes to try their skill on the slopes round about. Fortunately they were gentle ones. No casualties sustained. . . . We overlooked the town of Arlon, and a graceful cathedral spire dominated. We visited the shops at off hours, stocked up on Belgian lace and had our first "ice cream" which wasn't, exactly — but give them credit for trying.

Guard duty was a cold, dismal affair. We had carbines now, and meant business. There were three gates to guard, and you could never be sure which one required the most attention. Those pitch dark nights didn't help matters.

Five members of the unit received the bronze star. Amid a swirl of prognostications our C.O. left for the U.K., presumably to arrange for our departure to the C.B.I., but it later turned out he just went for a rest, which he didn't get.

The 101st celebrated its second birthday (29 January) by being about as busy as it had ever been. No cake and candles, but packed wards and an operating room full of difficult and heart-breaking cases. Shock kept up its grim work — technicians labored until they were glassy-eyed — and saved lives.

Being 2 years old was another milestone. Perhaps there were a few quiet toasts drunk, and more than a few wistful thoughts concerning our next birthday, but that was all. There wasn't time for anything else.



X.

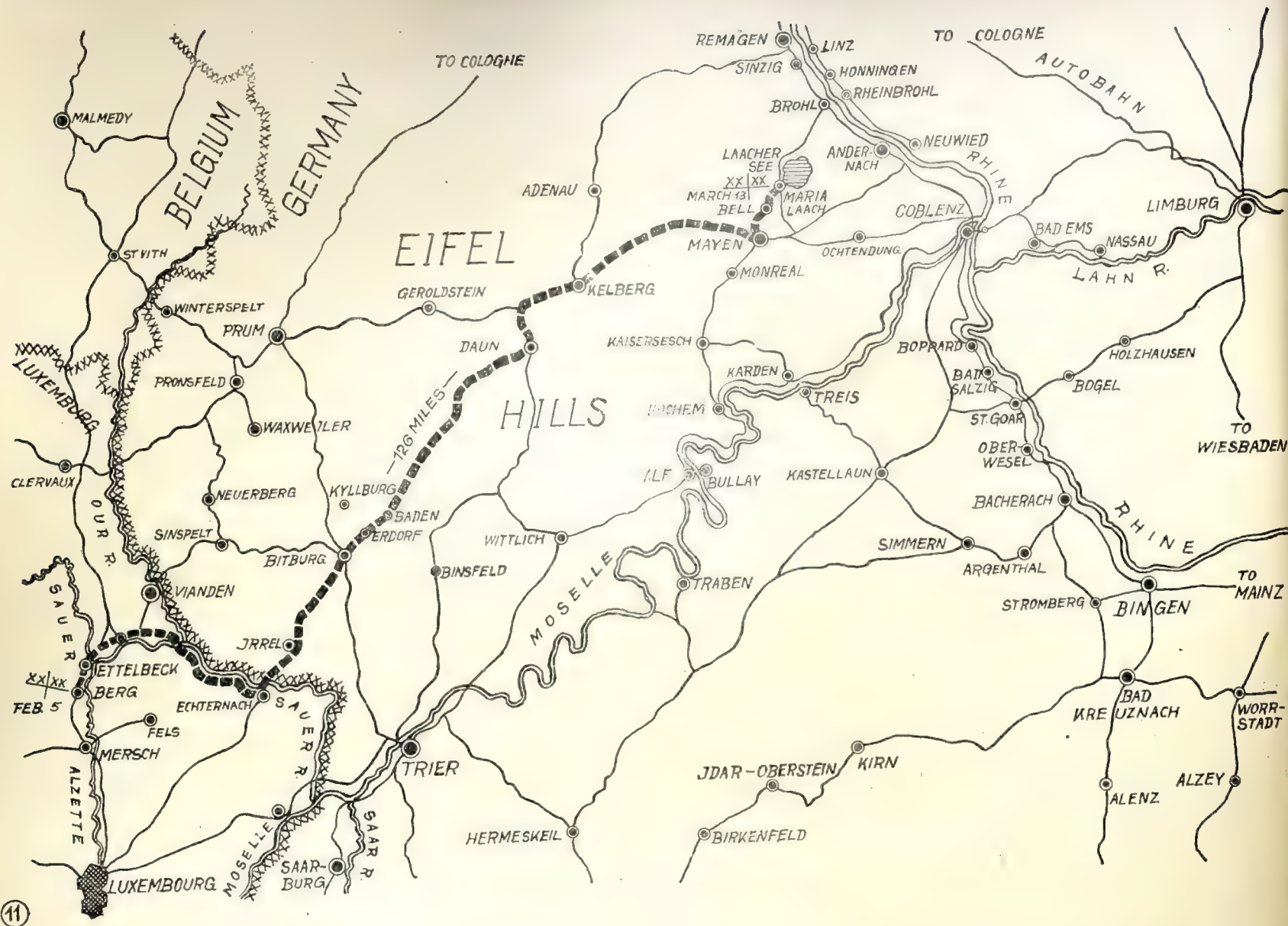
On February 7th a host of M.P.s arrived to convert our Arlon home into a Prisoner of War collecting point, and, anxious to escape that category, we pushed on into Luxembourg into the most luxurious building we had yet seen. It was a short drive through beautiful rolling country-side. As we approached the adjoining towns of Colmar and Berg we could see through the trees the brown stucco towers of the Grand Duchess' summer palace, looking like a vision in a fairy tale. This was to be our new home for something over a month.

The interior of the palace was regal. The main stairway was of marble with a magnificent dome. From the ceilings in many of the rooms hung huge, dripping clusters of chandeliers. The bedroom of the Duchess (Ward 11) was heavy with tapestry, ornate statuary and satin paneled walls. Admission was in a graceful reception room on the main floor with beautifully gilded doors. Pre-Op was next door in the ball room.

During the chaos of moving in the entire hospital in one day, the place resembled a 3 ring circus in an incongruous old world setting. Though the hallways strode a distinguished figure clad in British uniform. "All this is mine", he announced grandly. "Take good care of the furniture, boys", he remarked to the noisily unpacking wards. "It's all I have left." Darned if it wasn't. He was our landlord, the Prince of Luxembourg.

But however impoverished the Prince may have felt he could not but have agreed that his summer residence was serving a far worthier purpose than it had during the regime which had ended here so abruptly a few days before. This palace, we discovered, had been an institution run by the State to teach young German girls of the glory of their race and the obligations of motherhood—nothing more. We found books and other materials suggesting the process by which the minds of the young frauleins were systematically warped. . . . It was an unpleasant association—we were thankful that we were concerned with the saving of lives. . . .

One man left the unit for a 30 day furlough in the States. His name was drawn before a tense and excited unit gathering in the 101 Playhouse. It was a slim chance—one in 200, but one of those things that help to jog the dull monotony of a seemingly endless war. However, looking back over 5 weeks spent in our gilded dwelling it was obvious that some real advances had been made. When Pre-Op is empty, the boys in X-Ray twiddle their thumbs, and the wards have enough Stars and Stripes to go around, we know the front is leaving us behind and it behooves us to catch up. That's what we're for.



XI.

Germany at last! Through the wreckage of the fleeing German army and over rough roads crowded with our own, in hot pursuit, we moved, on the 13th of March, to Maria Laach, just 10 miles from the Rhine, near Coblenz. Shortly before had come the exciting news of the capture of Remagen bridge and the link-up of the First and Third armies. That terrible barrier, the Rhine, was crossed — now, it was anybody's guess. Germany presented scenes of opulent landscapes and systematic devastation. The road was scarred and gutted as endless convoys followed its winding course — guns, gasoline, maintenance, troops, supplies; and, to complete the picture, truckload after truckload of PWs headed the other way. Civilians and refugees in all manner of strange uniforms watched us pass.

It was an all day trip, and late in the afternoon we passed through the ruins of Mayen and headed for the resort place of Laacher See and its fabulous Abbey, hidden in a wooded hilly section, and not far from the lake which gives it the name.

We moved into the building as a German hospital moved out, an ironic procedure in view of the following day, which brought an in-rush of patients, most of whom were German. Yet the grimness of war couldn't disrupt the quiet, peaceful atmosphere of the great old church that dominated the scene. Its foundations were laid sometime in the 11th century, and over a period of 200 years from that time, work on it was continued whenever possible, and many styles of architecture were prominent as ideas of one generation doubtless succeeded another. The Abbey itself has always been self-sufficient, keeping its own food and livestock, since the land adjoining could be used for grazing and cultivating. The Fathers and Brothers of the Abbey are skilled in all duties and carried them out industriously and with a grave sort of detachment. They might have considered us perhaps a part of the history of the building, as we certainly were. This impressive milestone had seen turbulent times. When we left, we were replaced by British occupational troops. Maria Laach was truly cosmopolitan.

For the first time in unit history the hospital closed and began packing for a move, then had to open up again. Other hospitals were overcrowded, and our reconnaissance group was having difficulty finding an area. Patients were coming in now from liberated German prison camps — our own men, looking like ghastly shadows of what they had been, with stories of horror and unspeakable violence. They were encouraged at the news of breakthroughs all along the line, on all fronts. We felt that old September optimism. On April 2 we began the long drive to Hersfeld, deep in Germany. Many thought this would be the last move.

XII.

This trip was to take us well across the Rhine, and a rather lengthy detour was necessary to avoid First Army territory, which had enough traffic of its own without us. Moreover, no definite place to set up had yet been agreed upon — our convoy was to meet the reconnaissance jeep at Aulatal and proceed from there into the proposed site in Kassel.

On this journey of 200 miles we saw some colorful and historic parts of Germany. Driving along the east bank of the Rhine, crumbling castles of medieval origin could be seen on both sides. Just south of St. Goar was the renowned Lorelei rock, made famous by the poet Heine. And above here was the Rheinfels castle, reputedly the strongest on the Rhine, and besieged during the 13th century for a year without success. . . .

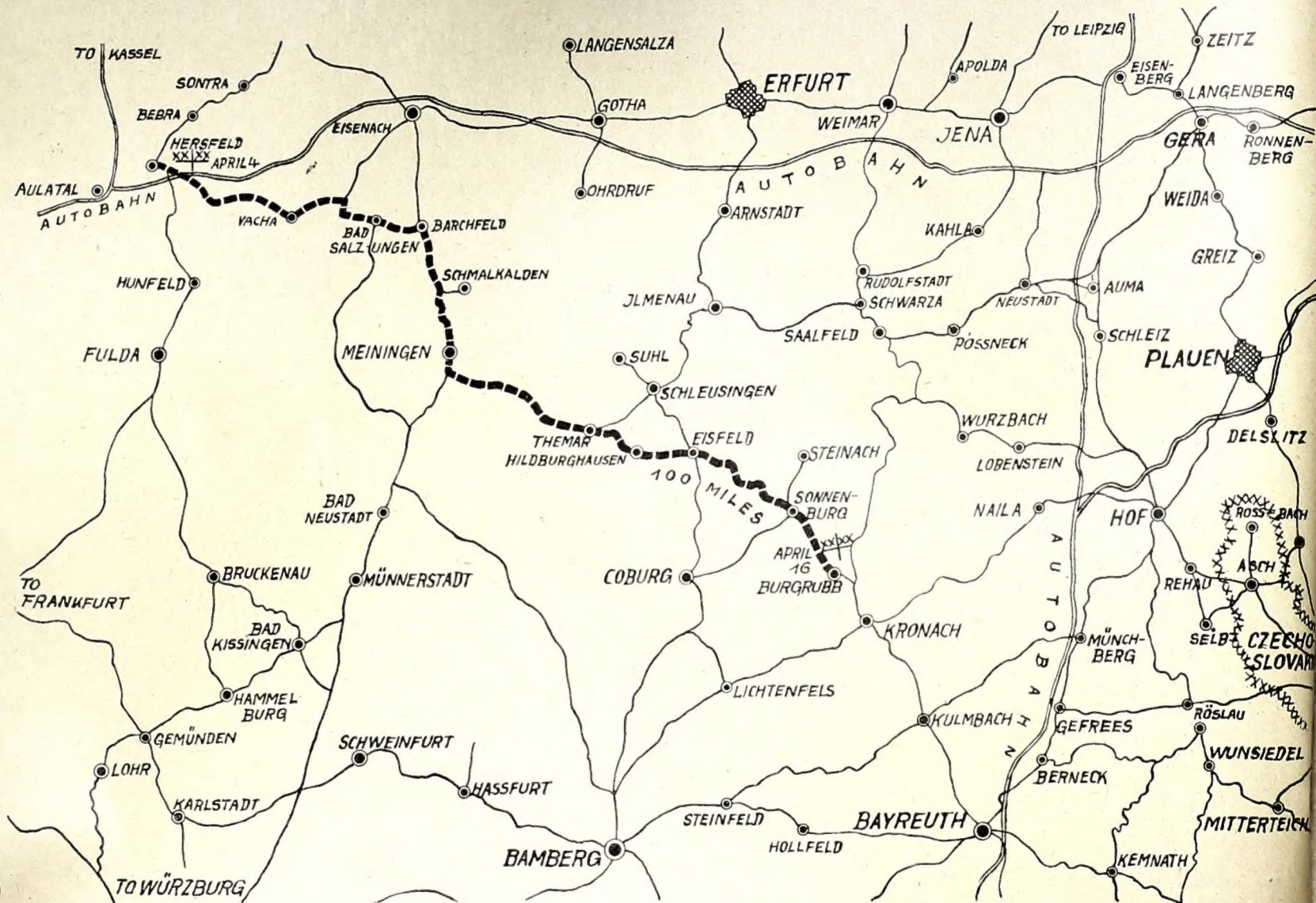
As we got into the vicinity of Wetzlar (where the German writer Goethe once lived) we began seeing many scattered groups of liberated prisoners on the road from overrun German prison camps. There were scattered groups of Poles, Russians (who always saluted), Siberians, and dusky Moroccans who rode around on bicycles and grinned happily in their new freedom. But the most unforgettable were the French. They marched in large groups with an officer at the head, a proud flag-bearer behind him followed by the main group, tattered, unshaven, dusty, bent under heavy packs. This was France, coming back from defeat and servitude.

We reached the famous German autobahn, a network of super highways criss-crossing Germany, built by Hitler to facilitate the flow of supplies. Suffice it to say, it worked both ways.

Reaching the crossroads of Aulatal we were greeted by the news that Kassel had not been taken, and the first echelon thereupon abruptly "stayed put" for the night. By late afternoon of the following day, we had laid claim at Hersfeld to a hotel which was still full of German patients. The X-Ray truck spent Tuesday night there as an advance party. Wednesday the whole first echelon moved in. And on this same day, the second echelon left Maria Laach and arrived in Kassel where they naturally found no trace of the 101; only an old building to spend the night in, which reverberated to the sound of heavy artillery.

By Saturday, at any rate, this long arduous move was completed. Personnel were billeted in civilian homes for the first time in Hersfeld. The owners were simply told to vacate. The houses were comfortable and well furnished. The hospital set-up was a hotel of insufficient size, with wards across the street to the left and supply across the street to the right, Dispensary around the corner and E.M. Mess over yonder. While at Hersfeld, 12 stunned individuals received 7 day trips to the Riviera and donned Class A uniform for the first time in many a moon.

Rumors hinted an early move, back to the field. Our moves would be getting closer together from now on. German resistance was all but shattered. The Russians were on the move again and Berlin was in danger. The net was growing tighter.



XIII.

We heard the call of the wild again, dragged all available canvas out of storage, and after a hasty reconaissance found ourselves back where we started — in a tent. We were greeted, of course, by the rain and the mud, but it was German mud and there was very little left of it that wasn't being rapidly turned over to Allied troops. The Big News, in fact, was eagerly awaited, though with it came the realization that the work of the hospital would continue long after the last shot had been fired. More and more cases of exposure, malnutrition and the harrowing effects of the war began to show themselves.

Yet it was good to be out of doors again. There was a freedom, an informality about that tented existence that will take a large place in our memory of these days and events.

We stayed in Kronach two weeks and then moved on to Parkstettin, not far from the Danube, and about ten days later the war finally petered out like a spent firecracker. No one seemed very much surprised, but there was a happy feeling inside, and a relief that you couldn't describe. It had been stored up over those years of basic training and maneuvers and those tense days in England while the whole world waited for D-Day, and the long hard-fought campaigns through many of the towns shown on these maps. Yes, the big job in Europe was done. There would be no more battle casualties, no more darkened ambulances grinding to a stop at Admission with their silent broken men on litters. Hostilities had ceased.



REGENSBURG, GERMANY

As this book goes to press, the war has been over some six weeks. The 101st is still in operation, back in buildings once more, as the future of each member is being carefully weighed by the Powers that Be. Do we go home? Do we stay here? Are we CBI bound? It's a difficult period for all concerned, and the future of the unit is precarious. Already we are being sifted, are losing some good friends.

Personnel can be scattered to the four winds, but you can't ignore the impressions the past year or so have made on you. This is the way that we went. So put this book away with your snapshots, souvenirs de la guerre etc. You may want to retrace the route through these pages some day.



Krankenhaus der Barmherzigen Brüder
Regensburg



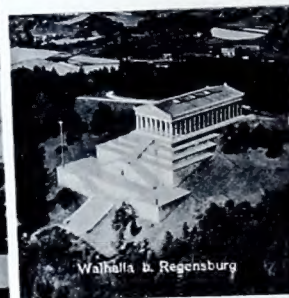
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